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FBI's Seeds of Paranoia Are Blooming

Documents stolen from the Media office of the FBI indicate that the bureau wants to "enhance the paranoia endemic" to New Left circles, and the policy already seems to be bearing fruit.

A check of the FBI and people the FBI checks would indicate that people on both sides could be paranoid or at least think someone else is.

CONVINCED OF TAPS

Virtually every revolutionary or activist listed in the stolen files and interviewed by the FBI insists that his or her phone is tapped.

Two said they could hear police radios in the background.

Dr. Daniel Bennett, the Swarthmore College philosophy professor under surveillance by the FBI, said he "had no feeling about paranoia . . . I think the FBI is paranoid."

When asked about its memo on enhancing paranois among New Leftists, the FBI said: "It's the newspapers" that are paranoid.

'HOW DO I KNOW?'

The father of one of the people listed in the stolen files refused to speak to a reporter on the phone, saying, "How do I know you're a reporter . . . how do I know your're not someone down the block?"

Another FBI subject not only thought the FBI was tapping his phone, he thought that it, or a similary agency, was responsible for three burglaries of his office.

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Lots of Questions, No Answers

When The Inquirer called the FBI in Washington for comment on questions suggested by 14 of the documents stolen from the Media FBI office, the conversation went like this:

Inquirer: I've got some questions here about the stolen documents.

FBI spokesman (unidentified): We're not talking about this case, but you might as well go ahead and ask them.

Q. Who authorized the phone taps?

A. There's no evidence that we tapped phones.

Q. Why does the FBI list all the black students at Swarthmore?

A. No comment.

Q. Why such an interest in meetings of the Black Economic Development Council (the group that issued the Black Manifesto in 1969, asking for reparations for mistreatment of black people? I've never heard the BEDC called a subversive group.

A. No comment.

Q. Does the FBI cross-file all the names listed in its documents without any other reference? If not, why list them?

A. No comment.

Q. What evidence can the FBI give that these 14 documents do not reflect its general policy, as the bureau has claimed?

A. If you'll go back and reread that story, you'll find that we never said that. (A check showed that the statement was attributed to a spokesman for the Justice Department, parent agency of the FBI.)

No Blank Check for Government

The United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in Cincinnati has upheld a lower court's opinion that the Justice Department is violating the Constitution by using wiretaps without court authorization. The ruling challenges Attorney General Mitchell's view that the eavesdropping powers of the executive branch in defense against "dangerous" groups are virtually unlimited

The question, which will doubtless be brought to the Supreme Court, is central to the maintenance of constitutional restraints on government. Mr. Mitchell gives top priority to the principle of "inherent" Presidential powers. He asserts that his authority, representing the White House, should alone determine the need "to protect the nation from attempts of domestic organizations to attack and subvert the existing structure of government."

This would be a sweeping mandate. Mr. Mitchell's insistence on these powers, unhampered by easily obtainable court warrants, is made more ominous by his department's bluntly stated view that "self-discipline on the part of the executive branch" is sufficient to guard against excesses.

Such a philisophy of executive prerogative stands in direct contradiction to the principles of constitutional government and the doctrine of checks and balances. The history of the relationship between governments and the governed teaches that a blank check of official powers is the prelude to their abuse.

Judge George C. Edwards Jr., a former police chief who thus is familiar with the temptations inherent in the governmental police function, wrote in the majority opinion that it is the "historic role of the judiciary to see that in periods of crisis, when the challenge to constitutional freedoms is greatest, the Constitution of the United States remains the supreme law of the land."

The Government, in seeking what it conceded was an "awesome power" pledged that the Attorney General would always use it "with discretion." The power is indeed awesome; to ask for it is arrogant. And, as Judge Edwards added, the Government's discretion in the use of such powers has, regrettably, become a matter of serious doubt.

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